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ABSTRACT

The sixth of eight related documents, this monograph describes the parent study group aspect of the Reading Instruction and Pupil Personnel Services (RIPPS) program. The document describes the background and rationale for this parenting program, designed to help parents understand their child and the role parents play in a child's development, and to teach parents skills that will help enable the child to function more effectively in school and at home. Procedures for notifying parents of the study group are given, followed by a description of the actual study group meetings. The goals of the program and the process by which those goals are met are also described. The advantages for a parent group whose leader is at once a family counselor, school psychologist, and a teacher are explored. The appendix contains a bibliography of suggested references for developing such a parenting program, a course outline, and guidelines for parents in the course. (HTH)

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PARENTING

MONOGRAPH 5

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RIPPS
READING INSTRUCTION & PUPIL PERSONNEL SERVICES

Prepared by the RIPPS Demonstration Project

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6/79

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INTRODUCTION

Why Training For Parents?

The family is the most significant influence in the development of the child. Our values, attitudes and perceptions of life are influenced greatly by the quality of our relationship with our parents and the training procedures our parents used. Yet, parenting is the last vestige of the "amateur!" An increasing percentage of our children are under-achieving, uncooperative, unmotivated and apparently unhappy. If parenting is left to the "amateurs," one can only expect a continuation of these trends.

The effects of irresponsible and ineffective parenting on individuals and society are far reaching. Responsible parenthood is of crucial importance. Schools have an opportunity to break this cycle of ineffectiveness and assume some of the responsibility in preparing parents for skillful parenthood. A powerful influence on parenting, as in the learning of any job skill, is that of the "live models" provided for observation and practice. If present-day parents can improve their parenting and learn more effective skills, they will transmit these by example to their children.

The job of parent education and re-education is important. When school professionals act as catalysts in the parent-training movement and successfully fulfill their role, society is almost certain to gain more productive children.

The parenting aspect of the RIPPS Program has successfully demonstrated that parent education is a vital component toward helping the child feel more positive about himself and more effective in his school performance. An educational program for parents, designed to make them aware of the possible effect of their behavior and attitudes on their child, both at home and school, has become an integral part of the RIPPS process. This cooperative venture has resulted in a closer parent/school relationship which proves most effective in enabling the child to function more positively in both the cognitive and affective areas.

The Parent Study Group described in this Monograph is the vehicle by which this is accomplished.

Background

The parenting aspect of the RIPPS Program is based on the concept that the parent is a vital member of the team serving each child.

Basic to the functioning of the progam is the parent counseling and study group. The group educates parents in child-rearing techniques and provides insight, skills and awareness that enables the parent to help the child both at home and in the school. Often the attendance of parents in such groups has a far more reaching effect on the child's school performance than actual instruction and counseling.

A secondary gain from these groups is a more active and positive involvement of parents in the schools. Knowing and understanding that the school is interested in the individual child and parent is an important part of the cooperative effort. We are working together for the same goal which is to provide the best and most effective school experience for the child.

The uniqueness of the Parent Study group is that it supplies a direct approach to problems that the RIPPS child may be having that the reading teacher or guidance counselor cannot remediate in the school setting. Although the child may desparately need the services of the RIPPS team, if the parent does not prevent or modify actions that interfere with the child's effective functioning, the success of the child in the school situation will be limited.

The child is a unified system — what influences one aspect of him has effect upon all of him. He is continually organizing himself and his world. All aspects of a child's development can be understood as reflecting the nature of his life experiences. Appropriate instruction is crucial for full development. Intellectual growth cannot be isolated from mental health, a sense of adequacy and self-fulfillment.

Parental love is the most powerful, most constructive force in a child's growth. A child wants to grow. He does not want to stay small, either in his physical growth or in his ability to handle life. How fast or how well he grows depends upon the feelings of the adults about him, and upon feelings within himself.

Parents are their children's first teachers. Children learn more in their first five years of life than at any other time. Therefore, parents can be considered the most important teachers children will ever have.

The child's outlook on life will be initially created in the home. If parents are aware of the factors that influence their child's growth and development, they can provide experiences which will foster both, and make those first years a rich learning experience.

Once the child begins school, the learning experience then becomes a team effort. The entire team (parents, teachers, specialists and resource people) is designed for one purpose — to help the child learn and to be successful in school and in the tasks of life.

The problems of discipline and education are shared by the home and the school. It is essential that they have common goals and mutual cooperation. Educators and parents are imbued with good intentions, but fail frequently simply because they do not know what to do. Knowledge and skills, combined with good intentions, can have potent impact. As educators, our task is to find ways and means for optimizing the environment in which children learn and grow. Parent Study Groups within a school setting are a powerful means by which to bring about such changes and to bridge the gap that sometimes occurs between the home and school.

Rationale

Parent Study Groups are offered to the parents as an integral part of the RIPPS Program to help parents better understand the child, and to teach the parent skills that will help enable him to function more effectively both at home and in school.

The basic rationale for the group is to provide the parents with efficient and effective skills to help guide the child toward appropriate school behavior and to increase his general educational efficiency.

Parents have little preparation for the most challenging task in life — being an effective parent. Parents have little training for the awesome job and are expected to do well naturally. The failure to understand the basic requirements for effective parent-child relationships results in discouragement for both the parent and the child. This lack of skill has many unfortunate side effects on children. One result may be poor performance at school, since the home background is the most important element in the child's progress in the classroom.

There are varied theories as to how children learn. There is general agreement, however, that self-esteem, encouragement, responsibility and cooperation are important issues in the process. To be really effective, education has to accept the task of dealing with the total individual.

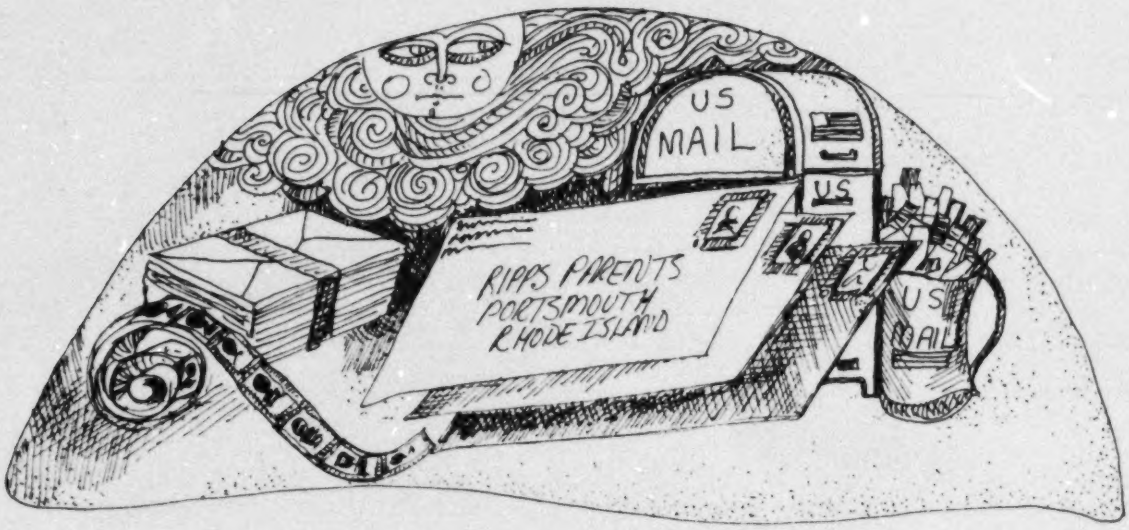
The school is where the effect of the early influences of the child's rearing are brought to light. Children come to school with values and attitudes they have learned in their homes in relationship to their parents and siblings. This manner of operating, or life style, usually is adapted to the school setting. Each child organizes himself according to his own personal perception or point of view.

The ability to function well in both the family and the school depends primarily on developing responsibility, cooperation and a feeling of self worth. If the child has not developed these traits, he usually has difficulty with learning and does not work to potential. While remedial work may be necessary to help a child cover material he has not learned, it will have little lasting impact if the child is not also helped to improve his attitudes about himself.

The child responds as a total being — with thoughts, feelings, and actions. Often teachers and parents deal with the child's actions as if they were isolated. In actuality, they are really part of a pattern. The adults must become familiar with the child's beliefs and assumptions about life. These provide the basis for the child's pattern of behavior, influencing the nature of the relationships he forms and his willingness to accept responsibility for his work and himself.

The child's failure to make his bed or clear the table may relate to his unwillingness to keep his desk at school clean, or finish his assignments. His habitual failure to respond to order is part of his basic approach to life. Reading and writing are the two subjects most affected by the child's reluctance to accept rules and to conform to them. No other subjects are so closely related to order.

Learning difficulties are often symptomatic results of problems the child is having during his developmental years. The affective and cognitive domains cannot be dealt with separately. The home and the school, working together, can make significant changes that will produce a more favorable climate for learning to take place. This is the goal of the RIPPS Parent Study Groups — to help parents learn ways to bring about this significant change.



Procedure

A notification is sent to each RIPPS parent informing them of the Parent Study Group, and articles are placed in the local papers.

The parent has already been given a brief description of the Group by the reading teacher on their first contact when the child has been officially accepted into the reading program. The teacher, acting as a member of the total team, discusses not only the reading aspect of the program but the pupil personnel component. Thus, the parents have previous information about the Groups before the mailing of individual notices.

The social worker, in making home visits, also explains the Parent Study Group and the benefits to be derived. Although she indicates that the Groups are for all parents, she may suggest to specific parents that the Group could be especially beneficial to them because of the type of problem the parent is experiencing with the child or the child is experiencing in school.

The counselors and the classroom teachers also advise parents of the availability of the Group, and suggest how it may be helpful in understanding and helping the child in the program.

It is emphasized that the Study groups are not "psychotherapy" for problem families, but an educational experience where parents can gain an awareness of more effective means of dealing with the normal problems related to rearing children.

Description

The Groups are held in the public schools, in a quiet area away from the busy routine of the school day. The Group meets weekly for two hours for a total of ten sessions which cover about three calendar months. The setting is in a pleasant room with the furniture arranged in a group setting, preferably in a circle or horseshoe shape, so that all members may see one another. Coffee and tea are served, and the atmosphere is non-threatening and informal.

An ideal size is about twelve members. Larger or smaller groups can be effective, depending upon the Group itself, the physical setting, and the expertise of the leader.

The Group is both lecture and discussion. A structured curriculum is presented based mainly on the works of Alfred Adler as presented by Rudolph Driekurs in his book, *Children: The Challenge*. This book is used as a text for the basic Study Group and has an accompanying leader's manual. Several other sources are also used. (See Bibliography).

In order for a program to be effective and to have long reaching goals, it must be based on a firm theoretical understanding of normal personality development in the child. Driekurs' work is a common sense approach to understanding the child's behavior in terms that the parent can relate to and also find meaningful. Techniques based on the application of the theory are simple to follow and extremely effective.

There is no charge for the Study Group and materials are provided, including the text and supplementary readings. The text must be returned at the end of the last session as it is used for the next Group.

At the first meeting, the participants get acquainted and a brief description of the course is presented. An outline is given which indicates the chapters and the topics to be discussed for the remainder of the sessions. There are also weekly assignments to be read in advance of the weekly meeting. This preparation provides a common discussion base, and leads to problem solving that is pertinent to each Group member.

The parents learn important aspects of child development and family relationships. After acquiring basic knowledge, they begin to examine their own families and the uniqueness of each person in it. They learn how and why certain conflicts arise in the family and what part their actions, as well as those of the siblings, play in the daily drama of living.

Emphasis is placed on the connection between home behaviors and many of the same behaviors in school. A common ground is established in order to work together with other members of the RIPPS team to improve the productivity of the child, and to assist the parent and the teacher as well. It is often helpful if the counselor can be present in the Group. This leads to a more viable understanding of specific problems, and a feeling of a true cooperative effort between the school professionals and the parent as members of the same multi-disciplinary team.

Although many dramatic incidents take place throughout the course of the Group, perhaps the most significant change takes place in the attitudes of the parents. They realize that they are not alone in their difficulties with their children. They get comfort and encouragement from the other parents. The Group is a place where they get support, understanding and the knowledge to solve most of their parenting problems. Parents gain confidence in themselves and realize how effective they can really be. They learn new approaches and skills that will benefit the family. When stressful situations are relieved, and the parent is enjoying the child more and the family is functioning more harmoniously, usually the child starts to reflect this in school.

Goals and Process

The goal is to help parents become more skilled and to develop a positive relationship with each of their children which will enhance the child's performance of his or her responsibilities in the classroom, in social relationships with others and, ultimately, in the adult world of work. It is this kind of parental commitment and support that will give the child a foundation for maximum future development and success.

An effective school program must deal with the child's entire environment. The most important aspect of his environment is the relationship between the child, his parents, and his siblings.

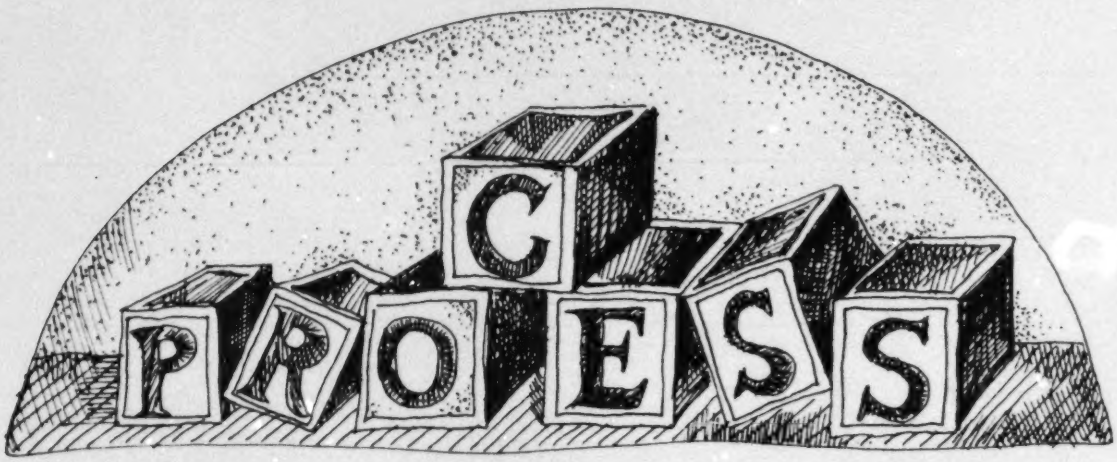
The Group first focuses on the fact that the parents are the most important of all the child's influences, and that it is quite within their power to effect change in the child's present problems.

In order to effect change, it is necessary to first examine the parents' attitudes toward themselves, their child, and their overall attitudes toward child rearing. These attitudes are the child's psychological environment. If the parents can alter these to better fit the family's needs, the child will improve his behavior and school performance. The prime requisite is a fundamental change, in a positive direction, of parental attitudes.

During the Group meeting, the parents report regularly on the progress they are making as well as on temporary setbacks. They interact freely with the leader and support one another. In group discussions, they are stimulated to re-examine the concepts taught, and gain an opportunity to exchange ideas. The Group acts as an encouraging agent for the members. Parents who have been struggling alone, feeling that no other family has such difficulties, are relieved to discover that there are many more in the same boat.

Learning becomes a common endeavor, with the members reinforcing each other. As the Group moves forward to the point where members spontaneously report success with new tried techniques, enthusiasm mounts and discouraged members find new hope.

Each Group has its own uniqueness, and the group approach is ideal for parent training. Individuals tend to be more aware of how people are reacting to them and how they are affecting others. Group interaction shows them this. The members learn from the experience of others, and a feeling of mutuality develops when concerned individuals find that others have similar problems — frequently more serious than their own. Parents tend to overcome their resistance to change by observing similar resistance in others.



Through discussion, they become aware that their own reactions and attitudes may have influenced their children's unacceptable behaviors. In an atmosphere of mutuality, Group members feel accepted when they raise problems. They also listen and learn from the other members. A parent can sometimes listen to another member's successful solution to a similar problem and apply the concepts at home without having to discuss them openly.

Most members become willing to consider new ideas when they can release their feelings about their own experiences in raising children. The expectation that members will apply new ideas increases the involvement and commitment to the members and adds to the group cohesiveness.

Each session is planned to present basic principles and to provide opportunities to practice the skills necessary for effective parenting. There is an opportunity to report on successes and difficulties, and an opportunity to clarify what each member is learning. The goal is not only to introduce new ideas, but to help the parents develop skills in applying the concepts.

While the parents are learning more about themselves and their children, they become aware of the total aspect of the child's life style and are able to apply this knowledge to the child's place in the school as well.

Techniques are also taught that aid parents and teachers to better communicate with one another. Parents who attend Study Groups usually become more actively and positively involved in the schools. The parents recognize the unique role they play in the child's educational development and realize that they, too, are vital members of the RIPPS team.

This realization is the essence of the RIPPS philosophy. Through an interdisciplinary team, the program offers an individualized approach in both the cognitive and affective domain. Attempts are made to influence all factors which contribute to the child's successful progress in the educational process — intervening at critical times at any significant place in the child's development — by working with the most significant people in his life.

Group Leadership

Although parent groups can be held at various levels of sophistication, the Parent Study Groups within the RIPPS program are conducted as a professional offering tied into a comprehensive school program.

According to the manuals written by Stolz [for "Children: The Challenge"] and Dinkmeyer [for the "STEP" Program (Systematic Training for Effective Parenting)], a group leader can be a trained lay person or professional whose primary job is to present and organize the material and refer to the text as the authority. This type of leader does not give advice nor is he an authority in the helping professions. He has abilities in effective communication and serves primarily as group facilitator.

The role of the leader in the RIPPS Parent Study Group Program is specifically designed to be one of a professional member of the multi-disciplinary team. The RIPPS leader is a trained family counselor who also happens to be a school psychologist with experience as a teacher and guidance counselor.

Expertise in group dynamics is essential, as coping with problems which arise from within the group takes skillful handling.

The parents come to school to learn valuable information and expect to obtain skills as well as professional advice. They want to work with the leader as an expert in family dynamics who can also affect change within a school environment for their child by working in coordination with the school personnel.

The leader will often initiate action with the RIPPS school counselors, social worker or reading staff when issues arise that could be helped by the intervention of an appropriate team member.

A professional parent counselor should ideally have a background in psychology, counseling, child development, and education and experience in group dynamics. Paramount to professional training is the leader's own personal make-up, which will greatly affect the group process. An effective leader must possess the ability to extend a feeling of personal adequacy, acceptance toward others, good judgment, warmth and a sense of humor.

No matter how well suited one may be for leading a group, no one person will have enough information to know all of the answers the parents ask. Therefore, the leader must not only possess humility, but the "courage to be imperfect". Some situations can only be coped with, not solved in the group or out, at that point in time.

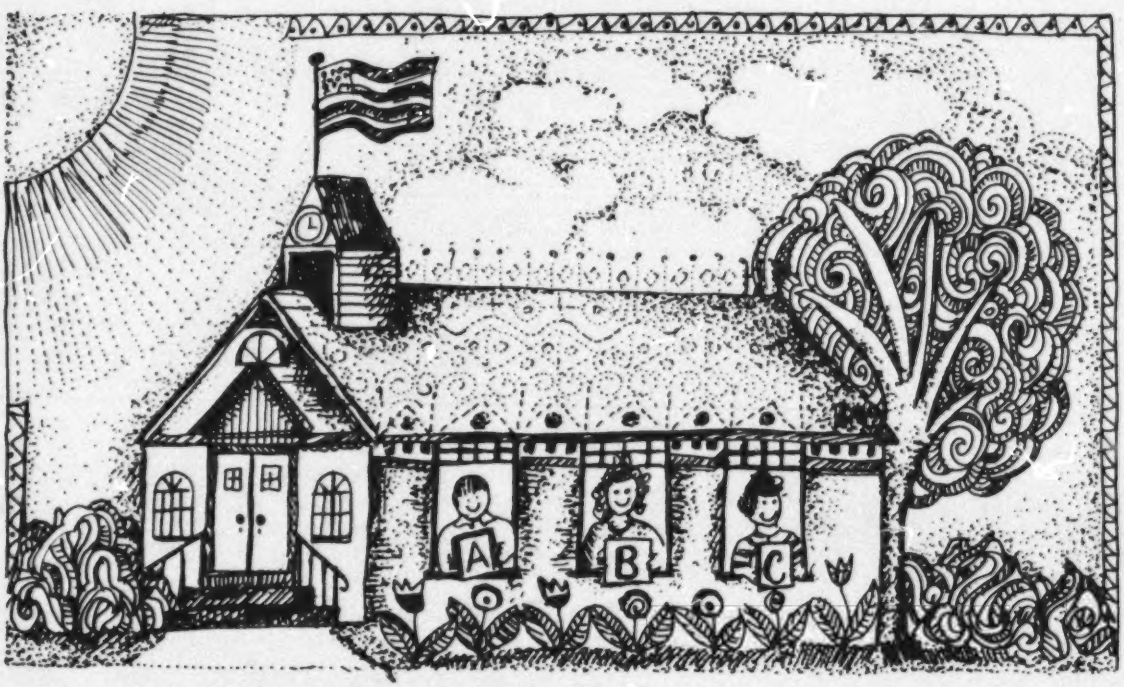
Of prime importance for the leader to realize and utilize is the power of the Group itself. A skillfully lead group can perform its own "miracle" within its unique structure. The members as a unit, performing feats that would be impossible by others, can often effect change for its members far more skillfully and effectively than the best trained professional. The Group is a powerful tool in the hands of a skilled leader.

APPENDIX

BIBLIOGRAPHY

SUGGESTED COURSE OUTLINE

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES



Summary

Involvement of parents in guidance and educational activities is appropriate and effective because parents are the primary factor influencing the emotional environment in which children live and grow. They are constantly contributing to the self-concept of their children and otherwise "guiding" them through life. Involving parents is significant in its own right. Carefully planned programs can be meaningful to children, teachers, and parents.

In recent years, professionals have realized that the role of the parent is a critical variable in the development of successful programs for the child who is experiencing difficulty. Until fairly recently, educators have dealt with parents primarily in crisis situations. The movement toward systematic programs for parents is a positive step toward providing parents with specific guidelines for dealing with these children over an extended period of time.

Whether formally acknowledged or not, parents are part of the school team. Too often, school personnel and parents function with regard to children in a kind of parallel play, often dealing with the child in antithetical ways.

The Parent Study Group within the RIPPS process is a viable approach to make the team concept work. The school has much to offer the parents — as the parents have to offer the school. Parents are a largely untapped resource, offering potential assistance in a variety of ways. For those parents whose own unsuccessful school experiences have led to ill feelings about schools, involvement in constructive and meaningful activities in the school setting can do much to improve their attitudes toward school in general, toward the teachers, and even toward their children.

A positive parent, well informed and possessing effective helping skills, is a valuable team worker and a positive influence on the child, the home and society.

The parent is the most constructive force in the child's growth. It is only common sense to include the parent in the education of the child, in a way in which the parent's role is unique and distinctive to that of the school. Membership in the Parent Study Group helps to define the parent's role, with far-reaching effect.

The Groups are heterogeneous in background and degree of problems and concerns. The advantages of combining in one group successful parents, trying to do an even better job, with less successful ones are numerous. The successful enthusiastic parents are models for the others. They also contribute support and empathy. The thrust is not on problems, but on positive aims and ideals which can be used by everyone.

This type of group can be offered to parents of children at any grade level, although the rate of success before the age of twelve is more rapid. It is of value to parents in all walks of life, and acceptable to all religious and ethnic groups. It does not require a given level of parent education or income, nor does it represent an excessive expenditure for the school system.

The Parent Study Group is a growth-oriented model stressing competencies and a healthy family. The educational model states that a healthy family is one that can learn whatever it needs to know. Learning to learn is the key.

The RIPPS Program provides that key to learning to the parents through the Parent Study Group.

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OUTLINE USING CHILDREN: THE CHALLENGE

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Maurice L. Bullard - Advisor

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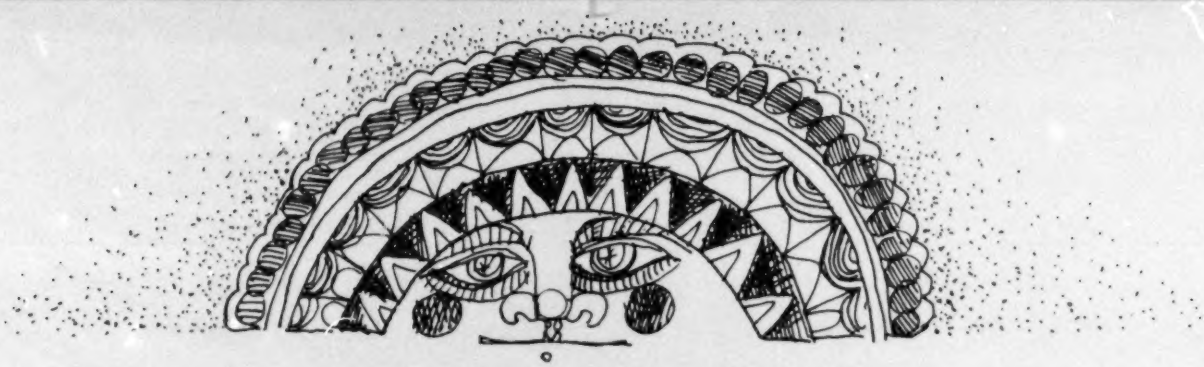
Corvallis Chapter
The Oregon Society of
Individual Psychology

(August, 1969)
(3rd revision)

WEEK	BOOK ASSIGNMENT (CHAPTERS)	DISCUSSION TOPICS	MIMEO	HOMEWORK
I	Scan the book	Family Atmosphere Family Constellation Purpose of Behavior	Outline and Suggestions to Participants Family Constellation	Have Fun Together
II	1 Our Present Dilemma 2 Understanding the Child 3 Encouragement 26 Mind Your Own Business 35 Have Fun Together	Encouragement	Presenting an Incident Only Child for a Day	Practice Encouragement
III	4 Child's Mistaken Goals 8 Show Respect for the Child 11 Eliminate Criticism	Mistaken Goals	Mistaken Goals Chart Goals of Social Responsibility	Look for Mistaken Goals
IV	5 Punishment and Reward 6 Nat. and Log. Consequences 7 Firm, not Dominating	Resolving Conflict	A Memorandum from Your Child	Use Consequences
V	15 Avoid Undue Attention 16 Sidestep Power Struggle 17 Withdraw from Conflict 29 Be Consistent	Toward Social Responsibility (mid-term evaluation)	Give me a Job	Withdraw from Conflict
VI	9 Respect for Order 10 Respect Rights of Others 12 Maintain Routine 13 Time for Training 18 Action, not Words	Order in the Home Training Time	Family Council	Time for Training or Action without Words
VII	14 Win Cooperation 31 Listen 32 Watch Tone of Voice 38 Talk With, not To Them 39 Family Council	Family Communications	ABC's Booklet	Try Family Council
VIII	22 Refrain from Overprotection 23 Stimulate Independence 25 Be unimpressed by Fears 27 Don't Feel Sorry	Developing Courage and Independence	My Neighbor	Never Do for Child what he can do for Himself
IX	19 Don't Shoo Flies 20 Courage to Say "No" 21 Do the Unexpected 24 Stay Out of Fights 28 Reasonable Requests 30 All in the Same Boat	Making Home Life Pleasant	Courage to be Imperfect Basic Principles	Stay out of Fights
X	33 Take it Easy 34 Downgrade "Bad" Habits 36 Challenge of T.V. 37 Religion	Courage to Be Imperfect Review	Evaluation Sheet	Apply Your New Skills Bibliography, p. 67



CHARTING YOUR COURSE OF ACTION

GUIDELINES

I. Theory

In guiding our children towards responsibility and cooperativeness, it is necessary to become familiar with learning principles of:

1. family constellation, family atmosphere and how you see the child's perception of his/her "place". Also be aware of how others perceive him/her. Be on the lookout for any "labels".
2. mistaken goals
3. the effect of discouragement
4. the futility of punishment and reward
5. the logic of natural and logical consequences and the understanding between consequences and punishment
6. the understanding of where you, as the parent, are actually "coming from" in dealing with your child.

II. Practice

With the principles in mind from THEORY above — now plan your action. *Identify the Problem — Who Owns It?*

1. What, specifically, did the child do?
2. How did you feel when this was happening?
3. How did you respond to the misbehavior?
4. How did the child respond to your reaction?
5. What purpose did the child's misbehavior have for the child?

III. After the Action

1. What principle was disregarded (or followed)?
2. What else could have been done and which principle would apply?